



General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

First Committee

23rd meeting

Thursday, 6 November 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

Chairman: Mr. Jarmo Sareva (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda items 62 to 80 (continued)

Action on all draft resolutions and decisions submitted under all disarmament and international security agenda items

The Chairman: I will now suspend the meeting to allow for informal consultations and to enable delegations to be informed of the current state of play with regard to draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 and the position of its main sponsors.

The meeting was suspended at 3.10 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.

The Chairman: The Committee will take a decision today on the remaining draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1, entitled "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects", as contained in cluster 4, "Conventional weapons".

Before the Committee proceeds to take a decision on draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1, I shall give the floor to those delegations wishing to make a general statement other than explanations of vote or to introduce revised draft resolutions.

Mr. Trezza (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) on draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1, entitled "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects". The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland,

Slovakia and Slovenia; the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey; and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The EU and its member States can legitimately claim to be at the forefront of the fight against illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. All EU member States and acceding countries are among the sponsors of the draft resolution. The EU remains committed to the full implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, and believes that the results of the July 2003 Biennial Meeting of States were very positive. Through its political support and its financial contribution to small arms and light weapons initiatives, the EU has proved the consistency of its engagement. We believe that the momentum of this important multilateral initiative should be maintained and enhanced.

In this light, the EU welcomes draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, and earnestly hopes that it will be adopted by consensus. As stated in the general debate, the European Union attaches great importance to the Biennial Meeting of 2005, which will represent a crucial step towards preparations for the 2006 Review Conference, and intends to propose that an EU member State chair the 2005 meeting.

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The problem of small arms and light weapons has many different aspects and the issue must therefore be addressed accordingly, at global, regional and national levels.

We would like to draw the particular attention of the First Committee to the fact that further substantive work is required on export controls, which are an essential tool to curtail the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons. At the 2001 United Nations Conference on small arms and light weapons it was agreed that one measure to combat the illicit trade in such weapons was to use authenticated end-user certificates. Such certificates help to prevent the illegal diversion and re-export of small arms and light weapons. The EU promoted the inclusion of a paragraph on that issue in this year's draft resolution on the basis of language that was taken directly from the Programme of Action. From the many consultations we conducted with countries from all geographical groups, we know that there is great support for taking this issue forward. The EU plans to come back to this issue over the coming year, in close consultation with other delegations.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Group of Governmental Experts, draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 would postpone the question of the nature of the instrument on tracing and marking which will be negotiated in 2004. The EU believes that it would be helpful to clarify that ambiguity. The EU is convinced that a multilateral, legally binding instrument in this field would yield considerable progress, first and foremost in enhancing the means of establishing evidence against illegal traders and those engaged in terrorist activities, and the quality of that evidence.

As I expect this to be my last statement in the First Committee, I would like to say a few final words on behalf of the European Union and acceding countries. Before our work in the First Committee comes to an end this year, and while the ship is being steered into the harbour, I would like to express to you, Mr. Chairman, our genuine appreciation for the seriousness and rigour with which you have conducted our work. We also pay tribute to you for your genuine and successful efforts to initiate the process of rationalizing and making more efficient the work of the First Committee. This was a special feature of this session, and we thank you for a job well done.

Likewise, I express our thanks to the Secretariat staff for their work and for the help they provided to delegations during the session. Our special thanks go to the secretariat of the Committee for the valuable services and advice that it rendered. The interpreters and translators have done an excellent and remarkable job, and we owe them heartfelt thanks. We are also grateful to all the officials in charge of conference logistics, so crucial to the success of the weeks of work.

Finally, I would like to convey to our fellow delegations our appreciation for the positive atmosphere and spirit of cooperation that prevailed among delegations this year. We must all commit ourselves to continuing to enhance our dialogue and mutual understanding; the EU is ready to do its part.

Ms. Notutela (South Africa): I am taking the floor on behalf of Colombia, Japan and my own country, South Africa, as the main sponsors of draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a major threat to people in the developing world, especially in Africa.

For several years, draft resolutions on small arms has enjoyed wide support and has been adopted by consensus. It is with deep regret — and we find it very distressing — that today, when we are considering the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms, we are forced to make a different decision.

I want to assure you, Mr. Chairman, and the other sponsors of the draft resolution, that the main sponsors have consulted very widely on various aspects of the draft resolution. We consulted extensively on all the issues that were raised regarding the programme budget implications. The savings that we could manage to get regarding the programme budget implications were, unfortunately, not sufficient. We regret that. We are now faced with a choice, and consensus on the draft resolution might be broken.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the other sponsors of the draft resolution for their patience. Action on the draft resolution was supposed to have been taken on Monday, but as of now nothing has happened. We regret the delay, but the commitment of the three main sponsors to the provisions of the draft resolution has been strengthened by what has happened this week.

I would also like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me enough time to consult with various delegations, including the other main sponsors. I want to re-emphasize the point that what we agreed upon in 2001 regarding the Programme of Action still remains valid.

Mr. Stritt (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland deems it most important to pursue efforts undertaken in the context of efforts to combat the proliferation of light weapons. As other delegations have done, my delegation deplores the fact that it was not possible to achieve consensus on the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 — which Switzerland nonetheless deems to be of the utmost importance — despite the intensive efforts exerted by a number of delegations. My delegation regrets in particular that the impasse is due not to a substantive issue but to a financing issue, which, for that matter, was detected in a particularly tardy way in our work.

Nonetheless, Switzerland voices the hope that it will be possible to resolve this problem before this draft resolution comes before the plenary for consideration. We believe in particular that it is possible both to mobilize resources and to deal with costs. We believe that some potential savings can be made without an adverse effect on the calibre of our work. In any case, Switzerland will strive in the days ahead to make its contribution to the quest for a ground-breaking way of resolving this financing problems — a solution that all delegations concerned find suitable.

The Chairman: If no other delegation wishes to make a general statement before we proceed to take action on the draft resolution, we will proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1.

I now call on the representative of Cuba, who wishes to speak in explanation of vote before the voting.

Mr. Gala López (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The United Nations, and in particular the General Assembly, as the multilateral forum par excellence, has demonstrated that it is the most suitable arena for elaborating, promoting, recommending and agreeing on the relevant steps aimed at preventing, confronting and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

The adoption in July 2001 of a United Nations Programme of Action to confront that scourge is clear testimony of that fact. In the light of the importance my Government attaches to this issue, my delegation will

once again lend its support to the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1.

We should like in particular to clarify our interpretation of operative paragraph 11. Our understanding is that the outcome of the broad-based consultations to be held by the Secretary-General must not prejudice the discussions to be held subsequently among Member States aimed at determining the measures necessary to reinforce international cooperation and address illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons.

Having put forward these criteria on the item before us and on this draft resolution, my delegation formally requests to be included among the sponsors of the draft.

The Chairman: The Committee will therefore now proceed to take action on draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1.

A recorded vote has been requested.

I give the floor to the Secretary of the Committee to conduct the voting.

Mr. Sattar (Secretary of the Committee): The Committee will now proceed to take action on the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1, entitled "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects".

The draft resolution was introduced by the representative of South Africa at the 13th meeting, on 22 October 2003. The sponsors of the draft resolution are listed in document A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 and also in documents A/C.1/58/INF.2 and addenda 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. In addition, Sri Lanka and Cuba have also become sponsors of the draft resolution.

In that connection, I should like to draw the Committee's attention to the programme budget implications of this draft resolution, which are contained in document A/C.1/58/L.56.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China,

Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

United States of America

Draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 was adopted by 162 votes to 1, with no abstentions.

The Chairman: I shall now give the floor to those delegations wishing to speak in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted.

Mr. McGinnis (United States of America): It is with great regret that the United States delegation has voted "no" on A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1, on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

Our Government strongly supports the substantive measures and activities proposed in the draft. However, the estimated cost of nearly \$1.9

million for activities not previously budgeted, communicated to delegations in an unacceptably late manner, through the associated programme budget implications contained in document A/C.1/58/L.56, left our delegation no option but to oppose this draft as a matter of fiduciary discipline.

All here know that the United States is an active participant and leader in the fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and that we will continue to work to that end. We view as particularly promising the marking and tracing exercise that would take place over the next two years, as it would complement the existing programme for marking and tracing small arms and light weapons in the United States. United States policy on maintaining budget discipline at the United Nations, however, is equally well known.

Even though steps have been taken to reduce the cost, the nearly \$1.5 million in projected costs identified in the programme budget implications on resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 are neither allocated for in the draft 2004-2005 biennial United Nations budget, nor offset by reductions in programmes of far less priority than combating this menace.

In a world of competing priorities and limited resources, choices must be made. To date, however, the necessary choices have not been made, either to pare down the activities called for in draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 to a more manageable level; to find offsetting savings in other programmes that, however worthy, are of a lower priority; or to do a little of both. Indeed, the entire process leading up to a disappointing end for this draft resolution in the First Committee deserves to be the subject of considered analysis at a later date.

As is well known, it is long-standing United States policy to oppose unfunded financial mandates that increase the global United Nations budget. Unmanaged, the activities provided for in draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 would do precisely that. The United States therefore intends to work vigorously in the Fifth Committee to ensure that this draft resolution becomes revenue-neutral. We hope that other delegations will join us in that endeavour, for there few priorities higher within the international community than combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. Working together, Member States can provide the full political support and full funding that this

critical issue rightly deserves and still keep faith with the need to maintain budget discipline.

Our delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the delegations of the primary sponsors of draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 — Colombia, Japan and South Africa — for their dynamic flexibility in searching for ways to surmount the challenges posed by a programme budget implications process in serious need of improvement. Today's vote by the United States in no way reflects on the stewardship of the draft resolution by those delegations. On the contrary, our four delegations spared no effort to try to find a way to bring about a consensus on this matter in the First Committee. In the end, there simply was not enough time remaining in the current session to craft a solution satisfactory to all delegations.

Our delegation looks forward to working in the Fifth Committee with the delegations of the sponsors and with other delegations to resolve the financial questions surrounding this draft resolution in a manner that will permit the United States to join in a consensus when the draft resolution comes before the General Assembly for adoption.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your excellent and efficient running of the Committee. We appreciate your efforts to revitalize the Committee. We also thank the Secretariat for the support it provided to you and to the Committee.

Mr. Ogawa (Japan): Small arms and light weapons are de facto weapons of mass destruction that claim a large number of victims every year. From the humanitarian point of view, it is imperative that we take urgent action to cope with this problem. We are therefore very pleased that we, together with so many other sponsoring countries, have been able to submit this draft resolution.

At the same time, it is important that the effectiveness and efficiency of United Nations budgetary spending be enhanced so that we will be able to address high-priority issues within the limited resources of the United Nations. In order to reflect such efforts in the United Nations programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, we must further elaborate priority-setting, among other issues. In that regard, Japan has opposed expanding the United Nations budget without discussion of priority setting.

Although this draft resolution involved programme budget implications, we assign high priority to the issue of small arms and light weapons, and we acted accordingly. However, our action on this draft resolution does not mean that Japan has changed its basic position on the necessity for a prioritization of United Nations activities or on the overall level of the United Nations budget. Therefore, we shall continue to review carefully the required cost and consider it with the Secretariat and the Member States concerned in order to avoid further increasing the level of the United Nations budget.

The Chairman: We have heard the last statement in explanation of vote after the voting.

I shall now give the floor to those delegations wishing to make general statements.

Mr. Goussous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the States members of the League of Arab States, I have the honour to express to you, Mr. Chairman, our profound appreciation and gratitude for your efficient management of the proceedings of the First Committee over the past five weeks and for your prudent leadership of the Committee, which has brought us to a successful conclusion that demonstrates the General Assembly's central role in the area of disarmament and international security. That conclusion is the culmination of a record of ability and efficiency — skills shown throughout your diplomatic career, both in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and here in the United Nations. I should also like to express our thanks and gratitude to all the other officers of the Committee for their dynamism, which enhanced our work, and for the complete transparency that they demonstrated.

The Arab Group would also would like to thank all the staff of the Secretariat and of its Department for Disarmament Affairs and to express its gratitude for the leadership of Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, who spared no effort to ensure the smooth deliberations of the First Committee. In addition, I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to Mr. Mohammad Sattar, Secretary of the First Committee, for his dedicated efforts, which have had a positive impact on the Committee's work. Our thanks go also to all interpreters and to the entire conference services team.

Mr. Syed Hasrin (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement

(NAM). First of all, NAM would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the manner in which you have conducted the work of the Committee over the past five weeks. We also express our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

As in previous years, NAM approached our session in a constructive frame of mind. We engaged interested delegations in informal consultations on our draft decisions and draft resolutions. Those informal consultations proved to be very useful, as they allowed us to exchange views with other delegations in a spirit of compromise and cooperation to find common ground. Where possible, NAM took on board some of the concerns raised by various delegations. NAM has also treated draft resolutions presented by other delegations in the same spirit. We thank those delegations that extended their cooperation to NAM.

The Committee has now completed its consideration of all the items on its agenda and has managed to adopt 53 draft decisions and draft resolutions within the period allocated to it. In fact, we finished one day early. That is a good achievement. In that connection, congratulations are due to you, Mr. Chairman, to the members of your Bureau, and to all delegations, political groupings and the Secretariat for your hard work and cooperation.

Nevertheless, it is yet to be determined whether our work at this session will achieve the positive results that we all look for. That is contingent on our will, collectively and individually, to follow up and implement the decisions and resolutions adopted at this session. The issue of the implementation of decisions and resolutions has been raised by many delegations. This question should be seriously addressed by all of us, especially against the backdrop of the renewed spirit and momentum for revitalizing the General Assembly.

In conclusion, NAM reaffirms and reiterates its commitment in promoting national peace and security through disarmament measures. NAM would also like to express our strong reaffirmation of our view that multilateralism and multilaterally agreed solutions, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, provide the only sustainable way to address disarmament and international security issues.

Mr. Jon Yong-Ryong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): I asked for the floor to clarify once again the position of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the nuclear issue between the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea and the United States. I hope that my statement on the nuclear issue between our country and the United States will help correct the understanding of all participants present here today.

From a historical point of view, the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula originated with the United States. In other words, it is in essence a product of the United States hostile policy of stifling the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by means of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the United States is now misleading public opinion, as if the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were placing the nuclear non-proliferation system in danger.

We cannot overlook the fact that the United States Secretary of Energy, in his statement at the meeting held at United Nations Headquarters on 5 November 2003, in reference to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, asserted that North Korea was in non-compliance with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and pursued a covert uranium enrichment programme. This is contrary to fact.

My delegation deems it necessary to take this opportunity briefly to summarize the nuclear issue between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States. The United States undertook the obligation to stop nuclear threats and renounce hostility towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in accordance with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States joint statement of 11 June 1993 and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States Agreed Framework adopted in 1994. However, the United States did not carry out any of its obligations but, instead, pursued the development of new types of nuclear weapons, further intensifying the nuclear threats against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In particular, the United States scrapped the 1994 Agreed Framework and violated the basic principles of the NPT by naming the Democratic People's Republic of Korea part of an "axis of evil" and making it a target for a pre-emptive nuclear strike and by evading its commitment with respect to construction of light-water reactors and stopping the supply of heavy fuel oil.

What on earth is international law? Who should implement it? Is the United States judgement or argument international law? Is the United States entitled to assess the implementation of international

agreements and punish the violators of its judgements? Should only small countries have the obligation to implement them? Is it not a violation of the NPT that the United States threatens to use nuclear weapons against small countries developing new types of nuclear weapons?

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea decided to withdraw from the NPT and strengthen its nuclear deterrence to cope with the ever-intensifying United States hostile policy and pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Are these truly threats to other countries or a violation of international law? Is the threat of the big countries against the small countries designed for peace? Where is the resistance of the small countries against threats to peace? It is necessary for the international community to discuss sincerely and frankly the issues of peace and security and justice and impunity. If the United States completely abandons its hostile policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, respects us and treats our system equally, we can dissolve the concerns of the United States. It is for that reason that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has maintained its consistent position of settling the nuclear issue according to the principle of simultaneous actions after advancing a proposal for a package solution whose ultimate goal is to realize the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

However, it is our position to respond to a persistent United States hard-line policy of stifling the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with a tough stance, and to respond to a friendly attitude of the United States with a corresponding attitude. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to follow closely the moves of the United States.

In conclusion, my delegation extends its deep appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for having dedicated yourself to achieving the desired results of our deliberations.

Mr. Udedibia (Nigeria): On behalf of the African Group, I have the honour of congratulating you, Mr. Chairman, and of thanking you for bringing the work of this session to a very fruitful conclusion. Through you, I thank the Bureau, the Secretariat, the interpreters and other staff that provided other services.

Draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1 is very important to Africa because the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons has largely been

responsible for the political instability, insecurity, economic stagnation and humanitarian crisis that have befallen the continent. For that reason, the African Group deeply regrets the inability of the First Committee to adopt this draft resolution by consensus, as had always been the case with similar texts.

However, it is our hope that the area of disagreement will be resolved early enough to allow for the full implementation of the draft resolution. We also hope that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus when it comes up for consideration at the General Assembly.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): On behalf of the African Group, which my delegation has the honour of chairing for the month of November, I would like to commend you, Mr. Chairman, on your superb performance in directing the affairs of the First Committee. Of course, we never doubted your capacity or ability to do so satisfactorily.

Yesterday and this afternoon, some delegations used what could be described as a maritime metaphor when they said that we were approaching the harbour. Mr. Chairman, as captain, with the assistance of the Bureau and the efficient Secretariat staff including the interpreters, translators and reporters, you steered the ship and made sure that it was not converted into a battleship. Now we are safely anchored in the harbour, one day earlier than scheduled. Of course, it was not all smooth sailing, especially during the past few days and this afternoon.

However, the African Group is gratified that, in spite of the small dent on the ship, the ship at least did not sink. We still have some hope that we can repair the damage done to the principle of consensus on major international issues. And we consider the draft resolution that we have just adopted (A/C.1/58/L.1/Rev.1) to relate to a major international issue.

Allow me to express our deep appreciation to all those delegations that supported draft resolutions sponsored by the African Group and those that were — and still are — of direct interest to us, including the draft resolution we have just adopted. I spoke of African-sponsored draft resolutions, but, in reality, these were draft resolutions of the First Committee and of the General Assembly, because, notwithstanding our national and regional interests, in the final analysis, when it comes to disarmament and international peace and security, we have a collective responsibility — indeed,

a collective obligation — to work assiduously and, by our action in this Committee, to make this world safer for us all.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Sierra Leone for the kind words he addressed to the captain and his shipmates.

Mr. Cato (Philippines): On behalf of the Asian Group, I have the honour of expressing our appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for steering the work of the First Committee to a productive conclusion. Under your able leadership and guidance, we were able to accomplish what we set out to do. We also take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, the members of the Bureau and the Secretariat, the interpreters, the translators and all those who in one way or another have helped ensure the successful completion of our work in the First Committee.

Finally, we commend all delegations for the cooperative spirit in which our work in the First Committee was conducted this year. This has helped us achieve our objective of bringing us closer to a safer, more secure, weapons-free world.

The Chairman: I give the floor to the Rapporteur of the Committee.

Mr. Carbo (Ecuador), Rapporteur of the First Committee (spoke in Spanish): I join in the words of congratulation that have been addressed to you, Mr. Chairman, on the work done by you and the Secretariat.

I have asked for the floor to express on behalf of my delegation and of my fellow members of the Bureau our appreciation to the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Mohammad Sattar, who after 30 years of service to the Organization — 20 years with the First Committee and five of those as the Committee's Secretary — will soon enjoy a well-deserved retirement. Mr. Sattar has had a long and productive career characterized by his professionalism and dedication. We thank him for his invaluable service and wish him success in the next stage of his life.

The Chairman: Let me say on my own account that I wish to echo the words the Rapporteur just expressed to Mr. Sattar, who is about to retire from the United Nations Secretariat and who has served the Organization — and the international community through the United Nations — with distinction for almost 30 years. It is with regret, Mr. Sattar, that we see you leave

the Organization, but you deserve your retirement, and I am sure that you will keep a close eye on the very important and very serious issues that your Committee has been dealing with for the 20 years you have been working with the First Committee. You will have no shortage of issues to follow, and I am sure that as a keen observer of current issues, you will follow them very closely. I hope you will be able to see us make progress, not only here but in other parts of the United Nations disarmament machinery. So, I wish to express my personal heartfelt thanks for your very good cooperation.

Mr. Stevceski (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Allow me, on behalf of the members of the Eastern European Group, of which the Republic of Macedonia is the Chairman for the current month, to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to congratulate you on your skilful leadership throughout all the stages of the work of the First Committee this year. Your tireless personal effort and dedication contributed immensely to the successful conclusion of our work. Our thanks and congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau and to the Secretariat as well.

The Chairman: There are no further requests for the floor at this stage. We have thus concluded the final phase of our work: action on all draft resolutions and decisions submitted under agenda items 62 to 80.

Before adjourning the meeting, let me make a brief statement in my capacity as Chairman of the First Committee.

Since its creation, the First Committee has been an integral part of a global norm-building process encompassing a wide range of issues on the international security agenda. While they lack the binding force of treaties, our resolutions can nevertheless serve to strengthen the rule of law governing the control and elimination of the world's most dangerous weapons. They can also identify the requirements for new norms, and gauge Member States readiness for them. Our work is necessarily political in nature because we seek to set priorities for collective action among Member States while providing a common forum for the expression of views by individual delegations and groups of States.

To achieve those challenging tasks, we must have procedures that are both flexible enough to accommodate the needs of all Member States and effectively structured to ensure that our efforts will yield concrete, practical results. I am happy that this year the Committee has taken some initial steps to improve its own deliberative process.

Last year, my predecessor urged all members to respond to the September 2002 report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on United Nations reform (A/57/387). Although, once again, we have not succeeded in adopting the full range of procedural and administrative reforms outlined in that important document, we have moved that process forward in a number of respects. We have set aside time for an informal exchange of views devoted to precisely this issue. Moreover, we have adopted 29 draft resolutions and decisions without a vote, including a draft resolution on improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee.

Now, it is my intention to prepare an assessment — my assessment, as Chairman — of the informal exchange of views on our working methods that we had a couple of weeks ago. In my view, it is extremely important that the essence of that very productive discussion be captured on paper. It must not be left to dissipate into thin air, as happens only too often in this Organization. I will share that assessment with the President of the General Assembly, with my successor as Chairman and, of course, with the members of this Committee.

In my view, the First Committee has a lot of untapped potential in the area of contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security. We should constantly try to improve our act. The laundry list of such action is long; let me highlight in this connection just a few examples of what, in my own personal view, could be done.

First, the general debate could be shortened to just one week. I recognize that this would not be without complications, especially for the smaller delegations. But, in my view, the benefits would outweigh the adverse effects. Most significantly, a more intensive general debate would allow for maximum participation from the capitals for its whole duration. We should turn the general debate into a true higher-level segment of our work, an annual gathering of the *crème de la crème* of Member States' disarmament and non-proliferation experts.

Secondly, the thematic discussion segment could be extended and transformed into a more interactive and consultations-oriented phase of our work. More specifically, informal consultations, whether on thematic subjects or on individual draft resolutions, could be used along the lines of the way they are used in other Main Committees of the General Assembly.

Such informals, chaired by coordinators appointed by the Bureau and with full conference services, could help Member States move closer to a common understanding on some issues and could at least provide a venue for a more interactive debate on some others.

Thirdly, our agenda should be overhauled to better reflect the actual thematic content of our work. Even if this were to be done for presentational purposes only, a more logical and transparent presentation would certainly help the "Mr. Public" referred to by the President of the General Assembly better understand what we are actually dealing with. Put very simply, we could reduce our agenda to 10 clustered items, identical to the current thematic clusters, with the various draft resolutions now adopted under each cluster constituting the subitems on a reorganized agenda. New draft resolutions could be introduced under any of the 10 clustered items.

Fourthly, even if the Chair of the First Committee is currently elected in advance, he or she should benefit from having the rest of the Bureau also in place well before the start of the session. Moreover, early summer may still be too late for the election to take place, if we are to allow the Chair and the Bureau to have an opportunity for advance consultations with member States. I would therefore suggest that the election of the Bureaus of the Main Committees be advanced to spring, some six months before the start of the new General Assembly session. This, as some other issues, will have to be decided within the confines of the General Assembly as whole, in plenary meeting.

Let me emphasize that this is only part of a longer laundry list of possible action to be taken. As I have said, some of the suggestions that I have made can be accomplished by the First Committee alone, but some others will definitely need to be acted upon by the General Assembly as a whole.

Let me emphasize once again that we are not pursuing reform for reform's sake but in order to enhance the impact and credibility of the work of this Committee. The true purpose of efforts such as reducing the number of draft resolutions, combining them or giving them a multi-annual format is not to be found in diminishing the substantive importance of any draft resolution. On the contrary, such reforms should enable us to focus our energies and attention on more concrete results. Because an improved process can also open the way for improvements in the substance of our work, I

am optimistic about future reforms — and I believe that we have made some steps in the right direction. Other progress — both procedural and substantive — may soon follow as a result of our deliberations.

I note in this respect that the Committee agreed to create two expert groups: on the security of global information and telecommunications systems and on the subject of missiles in all its aspects. In addition, the Committee adopted a draft resolution on establishing an open-ended working group to negotiate an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons.

Yet, like almost everybody else who follows the developments in this Committee, I too am troubled by the persistence of deep divisions amongst us on some very important issues on the global agenda for international peace and security. Once again, several draft resolutions have been adopted in the face of not insignificant opposition, in many cases involving the negative or abstaining votes of a very large number of States. Such divisions, however, do not constitute evidence of any failure of our process. Instead they symbolize the work that remains ahead in deepening cooperation and expanding the common ground on which we all stand. In the words of an old Finnish proverb, "A new day shows a new way".

I would like to conclude my statement by making some final remarks. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all members of the Committee for the cooperation extended to me throughout this session. I was particularly impressed by the spirit of compromise and flexibility demonstrated by all delegations during the various phases of the Committee's work. It was certainly a great honour for me to work with you all. I also thank all delegations for their full cooperation and support in utilizing the time and facilities allocated to the First Committee in an efficient way.

Moreover, out of a total of 46 draft resolutions and seven draft decisions, the Committee succeeded in adopting 29 by consensus. This outcome is clear proof that all delegations were highly productive in conducting bilateral and multilateral consultations throughout the entire session of the Committee.

Before concluding my remarks, I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to my fellow Bureau members: the three Vice-Chairmen, Mr. Anouar Ben Youssef of Tunisia, Mr. Suriya Chindawongse of Thailand and Mr. Ionut Suseanu of Romania; and our Rapporteur, Ambassador Miguel Carbo of Ecuador. Their wisdom, expertise and very good advice were instrumental in allowing me to effectively discharge my functions as Chairman of this important body. They have indeed always stood firmly behind me throughout this entire exercise.

Allow me, on behalf of the Committee, to offer my profound gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, for the support he and his staff have provided from the Department for Disarmament Affairs. On behalf of the Committee, I would again like to convey my special thanks to the Secretary of the Committee, Mr. Mohammad Sattar, and all of his colleagues for all their tireless efforts in enabling the Committee to proceed smoothly with its work.

My sincere appreciation also goes to all the interpreters, translators, record keepers, press officers, documents officers, conference officers and sound engineers who have diligently worked behind the scenes in order to bring the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

Finally, I want to thank the civil society representatives who, this year as in the past, followed our session and who are truly an indispensable part of the First Committee community. They helped to communicate the results of our deliberations to a wider public, and I want to add that I personally appreciated their counsel throughout our work and look forward to their constructive contributions in the future.

The First Committee will reconvene next year, sometime in early summer, to elect its Chairman for the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

The First Committee has thus concluded its work for the main part of the fifty-eighth session.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.